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FSQS
FACTS

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ABOUT LABELS
ON MEAT AND
POULTRY PRODUCTS,

Frankfurters, canned spaghetti and meatballs, frozen turkey potpie, chicken soup, chili con carne, pizza with sausage--these are a few of the prepared meat and poultry products that are subject to Federal (or comparable State) inspection and labeling requirements.

Any prepared food product containing more than 3 percent meat or at least 2 percent poultry comes under Government inspection rules. This means that such products must be prepared under Federal (or State) inspection supervision and that their labels must contain certain information. If the products are to be sold interstate, the inspection must be Federal.

All labels for meat and poultry products must be submitted to inspection officials for approval in advance of their use. Inspectors in the processing plants verify that the products being produced do, in fact, conform with the approved labels.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Quality Service, which administers the meat and poultry inspection program, is now considering whether present labeling is adequate or whether additional mandatory information should be included on the labels.

USDA REQUIREMENTS ON ALL LABELS

The following information must appear on all labels of meat and poultry products: product name; ingredients (if there are two or more); net quantity of contents; USDA inspection mark; and the name and address of the manufacturer packer, or distributor.

*PRODUCT NAME must be the name as defined by a standard, the common or usual name, or descriptive name. It cannot be false or misleading. FSQS sets minimum meat, or poultry, requirements for a long list of products. For example, a product to be labeled "beef with gravy" must contain at least 50 percent cooked beef; "gravy with beef" must contain a minimum of 35 percent cooked beef.

*INGREDIENTS must be listed in order with the ingredient present in the greatest amount listed first and so on down to the least. Spices and flavorings may be stated simply as "spices" and "flavorings" without naming each.

*NET QUANTITY must be an accurate measure of the contents, stated in pounds and/or ounces. The weight of the container is not included.

*A USDA INSPECTION MARK must appear on all packaged meat or poultry food products--soups to spreads -- that have been federally inspected and approved for wholesomeness. State inspection marks are required on State inspected products.

*THE FIRM NAME AND ADDRESS may be that of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor of the product.

OTHER USDA REQUIREMENTS

*If products are perishable, SPECIAL HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS must go on the label. Examples are: "Keep frozen" and "Keep refrigerated."

*NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION is not mandatory, but some processors voluntarily put it on their labels. When used, nutritional information is based on an individual serving. The label will state the size of a serving in common household terms such as ounces, cups, slices, pieces; the number of servings in the container; the calories and the protein, carbohydrate, and fat content per serving; and the percentage each serving provides of the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances (U.S. RDA'S) of protein and important vitamins and minerals.

*OPEN DATING (a calendar date on packaged food) is not mandatory. When used, however, it must be easily read and understood. The date may represent the last date the product can be sold, the last date the processor thinks the product will be at peak quality, or the date of packaging or processing. The packer must indicate what the date represents. Examples are: "Use by Dec. 8," "Sell by Dec. 8, 1979" and "Best if used by 12/8/79." Time beyond "sell by" dates is provided for home storage and use.

*If a PHOTOGRAPH OR DRAWING is on the label, it must accurately represent what is inside the can or package. For example, if five slices of meat are shown, there must be at least five slices of meat inside the container. If a product is shown in a serving dish or with a garnish not part of the contents, the picture must be marked, "Serving suggestion" or "Suggested serving."

*COUNTRY OF ORIGIN must be shown if the meat is imported. This applies to meat and meat products sold in the United States in the same form as imported. Examples are canned corned beef and canned ham. However, imported meat used as an ingredient in a meat product manufactured here loses its identity. For example, foreign beef that is combined with domestic beef in producing frankfurters or other types of sausage is not identified on the label.

*WHEN NITRITE IS NOT USED, "uncured" must be part of the product name for meat products--such as frankfurters, bacon, and ham--traditionally cured with nitrite. The statement, "no nitrate or nitrite added," must also be on the label, for example, "UNCURED FRANKS--NO NITRATE OR NITRITE ADDED." And unless such nitrite-free meats are preserved by other methods--such as thermal processing, drying, fermenting, or pickling--their labels must include the warning: "NOT PRESERVED--KEEP REFRIGERATED BELOW 40° F AT ALL TIMES."

OTHER ITEMS ON SOME LABELS

*COMPUTER SYMBOL. This symbol consists of a rectangular block of vertical bars over a code number. This symbol automatically registers the name and price of the item at special checkout counters now in use in many supermarkets across the Nation. The cashier passes the symbol across a scanner which reads the number and transmits it to a central computer. The name and price of the item are electronically flashed on a screen next to the register and printed on the customer's receipt.

*RECIPES or DIRECTIONS FOR USE. These are not required and not tested by USDA.

*METRIC MEASURE of contents. Here are approximate equivalents to the familiar household terms, pounds and ounces:

Mass (weight):

.035 ounce = 1 gram
1 ounce = 28 grams
8 ounces = 227 grams
1 pound = 454 grams or .45 kilogram
2.2 pounds = 1 kilogram

Volume:

1 teaspoon (.0167 fluid ounce) = 5 milliliters
1 tablespoon (.5 fluid ounce) = 15 milliliters
1 fluid ounce = 30 milliliters or .03 liter
1 cup (8 fluid ounces) = 240 milliliters or .24 liter
1 pint (16 fluid ounces) = 480 milliliters or .48 liter
1 quart (32 fluid ounces) = 950 milliliters or .95 liter
1.05 quarts = 1 liter
1 gallon = 3.8 liters.

USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

STANDARDS FOR MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTS -- A CONSUMER REFERENCE LIST (Unnumbered). Indicates minimum amounts of meat or poultry required in food products (from "baby food" to "won ton soup") bearing the USDA inspection mark.

FOOD SAFETY FOR THE FAMILY (Unnumbered). Gives tips for preventing food poisoning; recommends storage time and cooking temperatures for meat and poultry.

HOW TO USE USDA GRADES IN BUYING FOODS (Home and Garden Bulletin No. 196). Shows the grade marks you are likely to see on various foods and tells what they mean.

NO-NITRITE MEATS--HANDLE CAREFULLY (PA-1238). Alerts consumers that some processed meats--such as hot dogs, ham, and bacon--are made without nitrite (which acts as a preservative) and are very perishable. Gives hints for handling these "uncured" products.
